

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5804

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 1370

EXDIS

E O 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, XF, IS, EG, US

SUBJECT: ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN NEGOTIATIONS-- THE DECISIVE STAGE
APPROACHES

1. SUMMARY: ISRAELIS BELIEVE SECRETARY'S MID EAST VISIT WILL BE CRITICAL. OBVIOUSLY THEY VIEW MISSION AS DECISIVE STEP FOR ATTAINMENT OF SECOND-STAGE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI AGREEMENT. IN ADDITION, HOWEVER, ISRAELIS WILL INTERPRET OUTCOME AS IMPORTANT SIGNPOST FOR EVOLUTION OF ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE, LEADING EITHER TO FURTHER ACCOMMODATIONS TO GENEVA STALEMATE AND POSSIBLE NEW WAR. AGAINST BACKDROP OF FRESH IDF ASSESSMENTS ABOUT ARAB WAR OPTIONS, NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE VIEWED HERE AS GOI'S "BAPTISM OF FIRE", TESTING ITS UNITY AND SKILL IN PROTECTING ISRAEL'S POLITICAL SECURITY INTERESTS. ISRAELI OBJECTIVES, OVER AND ABOVE ATTAINMENT OF REQUISITE EGYPTIAN POLITICAL CONCESSIONS AS QUID-PRO-QUO FOR WITHDRAWALS, ARE THREE FOLD: (1) TO TEST SADAT'S INTENTIONS, (2) TO ATTAIN SIGNIFICANT PERIOD OF RESPITE FROM HOSTILITIES AND (3) TO

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DRIVE WEDGE BETWEEN EGYPT ON ONE HAND AND SYRIAN/PLO ON OTHER.

2. NEGOTIATING TROIKA OF RABIN, ALLON AND PERES IS PRESENTLY UNITED ON GOI'S OPENING NEGOTIATING POSITION, WHICH APPEARS TO BE RABIN'S FEB 12 KNESSET STATEMENT-- NO WITHDRAWALS FROM EITHER PASSES OR OILFIELDS WITHOUT WRITTEN AND OPEN GOE NON-BELLIGERECY DECLARATION. KEY QUESTION NOW IS EXTENT OF FLEXIBILITY OR TOUGHNESS WHICH MEMBER OF TROIKA WILL DEMONSTRATE IN HEAT OF NEGOTIATIONS. SENIOR LEADERSHIP HAS FOCUSED IN LAST TWO WEEKS ON ISRAELI ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, UNDERSCORING ITS CURRENT DEPENDENCY ON USG, AS WELL AS ON WASHINGTON REPORTS ABOUT POSSIBLE US GUARANTEES IN CONTEXT OF OVERALL SETTLEMENT. INESCAPABLY AND UNCOMFORTABLY AWARE OF CENTRALITY OF US/ISRAELI RELATIONS TO ISRAEL'S FUTURE, CRITICAL VARIABLE IN NEGOTIATING PROCESS WILL BE RESPECTIVE ASSESSMENTS OF THREE KEY MINISTERS RE DEGREE OF ISRAELI RIGIDITY RE DESIDERATA FROM CAIRO WHICH THOSE RELATIONS CAN TAKE. DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS ALSO WILL HAVE SIGNIFICANT BEARING, WITH RABIN'S AUTHORITY ON LINE AND PERES DEEPLY CONSCIOUS THAT HE IS REPRESENTATIVE OF RAFI/NRP HARDLINERS. CABINET WILL TRY TO STAY UNIT, EITHER FOR OR AGAINST PROPOSED TERMS OF AGREEMENT, BUT SPLIT DECISION IS ALSO A POSSIBILITY. IF CABINET IS DIVIDED, WITH HARDLINERS IN MINORITY, KNESSET SUPPORT WOULD BE REDUCED BUT PROBABLY SUFFICIENT TO ASSURE RATIFICATION. HOWEVER, NEGOTIATIONS COME OUT, ISRAELIS BELIEVE NEXT STAGE WILL BE FOLLOWED BY EARLY RECONVENING OF GENEVA CONF, WITH RESULTS OF GOE-GOI NEGOTIATIONS CASTING LONG SHADOW ON THOSE DELIBERATIONS. AT THIS POINT IN TIME, ISRAELIS BELIEVE BALL IS IN SADAT'S COURT AND WILL BE ANXIOUSLY AWAITING RESULTS OF SECRETARY'S VISIT TO ASWAN. END SUMMARY.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF SECRETARY'S VISIT-- ISRAELIS LOOK TO SECRETARY'S MARCH 1975 MID EAST TRIP AS MOMENT OF DECISION FOR ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN ACHIEVEMENT OF SECOND-STAGE AGREEMENT UNDER US AUSPICES. OUTCOME OF SECRETARY'S SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY WILL BE REGARDED HERE AS MAJOR TEST OF APL PRINCIPALS INVOLVED-- FOR US AS DEMONSTRATION OF VALIDITY OF STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH; FOR ISRAEL AS TEST OF GOVT'S AUTHORITY AND DECISION-MAKING CAPABILITY; AND FOR EGYPT BOTH AS MEASURE OF SADAT'S INTENTIONS AND OF HIS CAPABILITY TO DELIVER ON HIS SECRET

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OFT-EXPRESSED COMMITMENT TO PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION AND MOVEMENT TO PEACE. MOREOVER, RESULT OF NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE SEEN AS IMPORTANT SIGNPOST FOR FUTURE, CONDITIONING PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER ACHIEVEMENT OR STALEMATE IN RENEWED GENEVA CONF. FINALLY, ON DOMESTIC SCENE, MANNER IN WHICH NEGOTIATIONS ARE CONDUCTED AND THEIR OUTCOME WILL BE READ AS FIRST MAJOR TEST OF PRIMIN'S LEADERSHIP, FOR WHICH ALL THAT HAS TRANSPIRED SO FAR HAS BEEN BUT THE PRELUDE.

4. HARDENED GOI NEGOTIATING STANCE-- SINCE CONCLUSION OF SECRETARY'S LAST MID EAST VISIT, THERE HAS BEEN NO CHANGE IN OFFICIAL GOI POSITION-- I.E., GOI IS PREPARED TO CONSIDER TWO BROAD OPTIONS: A) A LIMITED PACKAGE, INVOLVING WITHDRAWAL IN SINAI OF 30-50 KMS IN RETURN FOR LIMITED EGYPTIAN POLITICAL CONCESSION; OR B) A "MAJOR AGREEMENT" INVOLVING WITHDRAWAL FROM PASSES AND ABU RODEIS IN RETURN FOR WRITTEN NON-BELLIGERENCY DECLARATION AND OTHER RELATED ELEMENTS. WHETHER OR NOT IT WAS FOR PURPOSE OF STRIKING A FIRM PRE-NEGOTIATION POSTURE, IT IS BROADLY BELIEVED, THAT GOI POSITION, "HARDENED" AS RESULT OF PRIME MINISTER'S FEB 12 KNESSET REMARKS. ISRAELI POLITICANS AND COMMENTATORS REGARD CRUX OF NEGOTIATIONS AS HINGING ON FORM AND CONTENT OF POLITICAL CONCESSIONS WHICH SADAT WILL BE PREPARED TO MAKE. EDITORIALISTS EMPHASIZE DESIRABILITY THAT THESE CONCESSIONS BE MADE IN WRITING, OPENLY AND DIRECTLY TO GOI, BOTH AS MEASURE OF SADAT'S "GENUINE" INTENTIONS AND AS LEGITIMIZATION OF RISKS WHICH ISRAEL WOULD ACCEPT AS CONSEQUENCE OF WITHDRAWALS. THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT RABIN'S ABILITY TO WIN SUPPORT FOR AGREEMENT IN CABINET, KNESSET AND FROM BROAD STRATA OF ISRAELI PUBLIC, WOULD BE GREATLY EASED IF EGYPT WERE TO MEET THESE DESIDERATA.

5. THE UNDERLYING OBJECTIVES-- OVER AND ABOVE ATTAINMENT OF SPECIFIC POLITICAL CONCESSIONS FROM EGYPT, GOI'S OBJECTIVES ARE TO GAIN TIME AND ELIMINATE OR REDUCE DANGER OF TWO FRONT WAR. A) TIME-- ISRAELI LEADERSHIP AND PUBLIC REGARD TIME COMPONENT AS MAJOR ELEMENT OF AGREEMENT, STRESSING INTRINSIC DESIRABILITY-- EVEN IN ABSENCE OF PEACE AGREEMENTS WITH ARAB STATES-- OF ATTAINING PERIOD OF RESPITE FROM THREAT OF TWO FRONT WAR. WHILE OPINION IN ISRAEL IS DIVIDED AS TO WHETHER TIME IS "ON ISRAEL'S SIDE", MANY ISRAELIS WOULD REGARD EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI AGREEMENT BARRING RENEWAL OF HOSTILITIES
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ON SINAI FRONT FOR NUMBER OF YEARS AS SETTING STAGE FOR MAJOR EFFORT TO RESOLVE OTHER OUTSTANDING ISSUES IN ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE. THEY BELIEVE IT WOULD PROVIDE BREATHING SPACE FOR RESUSCITATION OF SERIOUSLY-TRoubLED DOMESTIC ECONOMY, AND FOR CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT OF IDF CAPABILITIES, INCLUDING ACQUISITION OF AN TRAINING IN USE OF ULTRA-MODERN TECHNOLOGY, EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONS.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5805

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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B) EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN/PLO LINGAGE-- THOUGH GOI LEADERS AND COMMENTATORS ARE REFRAINING FROM SAYING SO PUBLICLY, ANOTHER MAJOR OBJECTIVES IT TO DRIVE WEDGE BETWEEN EGYPT ON ONE HAND AND SYRIA"PLO ON OTHER, ISOLATING SARG FROM ITS MAJOR ALLY IN CASE OF RENEWED HOSTILITIES, AND THEREBY NARROWING SCOPE OF ARAB MILITARY THREAT, AT LEAST IN OPENING STAGES OF NEXT WAR-- IF IT OCCURS.

6. INTER-ARAB CONSULTATIONS-- GIVEN THESE CONCERNS, ISRAELI LEADERSHIP AND MEDIA OBVIOUSLY WILL BE PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION TO INTER-ARAB CONSULTATIONS BEFORE AND DURING SECRETARY'S MIDEAST TRIP. IN PARTICULAR, ISRAELIS WILL BE ATTENTIVE TO IMPLICATIONS OF REPORTED RIFT BETWEEN SADAT AND PLO. ISRAELIS WOULD BE ENCOURAGED IF SADAT APPEARED TO EMERGE WITHOUT HAVING CEMENTED HIMSELF TO DEMANDS FOR EXPLICITLY-- PHRASED LINKAGE BETWEEN GOE-GOI AGREEMENT AND NEXT STAGES OF NEGOTIATIONS.

7. US GUARANTEES-- ISRAELI LEADERSHIP, POLITICANS AND

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COMMENTATORS HAVE BECOME SENSITIZED, IN LAST TWO WEEKS, TO PROSPECT OF US GUARANTEES AS POTENTIAL ELEMENT OF ISRAEL'S

LONG-TERM FUTURE RELATIONS WITH ARAB WORLD. ON BASIS OF CLARIFICATIONS BY SECRETARY AND UNDERSECRETARY, ISRAELIS DO NOT REGARD GUARANTEE ISSUE AS BEARING DIRECTLY ON ATTAINMENT OF SECOND-STAGE GOI-GOE AGREEMENT. ANALYSIS OF IMPLICATIONS OF US GUARANTEES IS JUST GETTING UNDERWAY, WITH OPINION DIVIDED AS TO MERITS AND DISADVANTAGES FROM ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE. EVEN AT THIS EARLY STAGE OF PUBLIC CONSIDERATION, THERE APPEARS TO BE CONSENSUS THAT US GUARANTEES SHOULD BE COMPLEMENTARY TO, RATHER THAN SUBSTITUTE FOR, CLEARCUT BILATERAL RESOLUTION OF ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE. ISRAELIS ARE GENERALLY PERSUADED, MOREOVER, THAT ATTAINMENT OF FORMAL US GUARANTEES WOULD BE POSSIBLE ONLY IN CONTEXT OF OVERALL SETTLEMENT-- A PROSPECT WHICH APPEARS TO BE A LONG WAY AHEAD.

8. ISRAEL'S ECONOMIC BURDEN AND US-ISRAELI RELATIONS-- GOI CONTINUES TO WRESTLE WITH POLITICAL/ECONOMIC PROBLEM OF HOW TO REDUCE GROWING GAP BETWEEN RESOURCES AND REQUIREMENTS. CRITICAL VARIABLE IN GOI BUDGET FORMATION, RESOURCE ALLOCATION DECISIONS AND ECONOMIC PROJECTIONS FOR NEXT YEARS IS OF COURSE US AID, IN BOTH ITS MILITARY AND CIVILIAN COMPONENTS. INEVITABLY, SENIOR GOI LEADERS HAVE COME TO RECOGNIZE THAT ISRAEL'S MILITARY NEEDS AND ECONOMIC LIMITATIONS HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED ISRAEL'S DE FACTO (BUT UNWATNED) DEPENDENCY ON US-- A FACT OPENLY DISCUSSED IN MEDIA. THIS DEPENDENCY IS SIGNIFICANT BACKDROP TO GOI DECISION-MAKING PROCESS RE SECOND-STAGE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI AGREEMENT. WHETHER AWARENESS OF DEPENDENCY WILL BE TRANSLATED INTO GREATER FLEXIBILITY ON TERRITORIAL QUESTIONS REMAINS TO BE SEEN. DIFFERENCES AMONG VARIOUS MINISTERS ON TACTICS AND SUBSTANCE OF BOTTOM-LINE NEGOTIATING POSITION WILL BE HEAVILY INFLUENCED, INTER ALIA, BY THEIR SPECTIVE JUDGMENTS AS TO HOW FAR GOI CAN AFFORD TO "STRAIN" ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH USG.

9. LEADERSHIP TROIKA-- TRIO OF KEY DECISION MAKERS, RABIN, ALLON AND PERES, APPEAR UNITED AS REGARDS OPENING GOI NEGOTIATING POSITION. BUT NEGOTIATING PROCESS WILL BE TEST OF THEIR UNITY UNDER FIRE. WE BELIEVE THAT IN CRUNCH RABIN AND ALLON PROBABLY WOULD BE SOMEWHAT MORE FLEXIBLE THAN PERES.

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SINCE SECRETARY'S LAST VISIT, RABIN HAS NOT TAKEN NEW POSITION, AND ALLON HAS KEPT LOW PUBLIC PROFILE, PERES ON OTHER HAND, HAS STRONGLY UNDERScored HIS "HARDLINE" POSITION, NOT ONLY LINKING WITHDRAWAL FROM OILFIELDS AND PASSES TO FORMAL NON-BELLIGERENCY DECLARATION, BUT CASTING DOUBT ON WORTH OF THAT DECLARATION IF ATTAINED. DEGREE OF FLEXIBILITY WHICH EACH OF THE THREE MAY REVEAL DEPENDS NOT ONLY ON THEIR RESPECTIVE PERCEPTIONS OF SUBSTANTIVE MILITARY/POLITICAL ISSUES AT STAKE, BUT ALSO ON THEIR DIFFERING POLITICAL REQUIREMENTS ON DOMESTIC SCENE.

FOR RABIN, ATTAINMENT OF INTERIM AGREEMENT WOULD CONSTITUTE HIS FIRST MAJOR SUCCESS, AND STRENGTHEN HIS AUTHORITY AS NATIONS'S LEADER. ALLON HAS STAKED HIS REPUTATION ON SUPPORT OF SECRETARY'S STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH. PERES ON OTHER HAND, AS SPOKESMAN OF RAFI AND NRP HARDLINERS, IS STILL STRONGLY LINKED TO HIS PREDECESSOR AND MENTOR MOSHE DAYAN, AND HAS LEAST TO LOSE BY HOLDING TO INTRANSIGENT POSITION.

10. A SPLIT CABINET? AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, TWO POSSIBILITIES EMERGE. THE FIRST IS THAT CABINET WILL REMAIN UNITED IN EITHER ACCEPTING OR REJECTING TERMS OF AGREEMENT. THE OTHER POSSIBILITY IS THAT TROIKA AND THREATER CABINET WILL BE DIVIDED. GOI COULD CONCEIVABLY DNEORSE INERIM AGREEMENT BY SPLIT VOTE. IN THIS LATTER CASE, RABIN AND ALLON WOULD HAVE TO CARRY OVERWHELMING MAJORITY; PERES, YAACOBI AND MABYBE HILLEL WOULD VOTE AGAINST.

11. KNESSET VOTE-- IN EITHER OF TWO ABOVE SITUATIONS, WE BELIEVE KNESSET APPROVAL OF CABINET DECISION WOULD BE ASSURED. IN CASE OF SPLIT DECISION, HOWEVER, KNESSET SUPPORT WOULD BE REDUCED WITH LIKELIHOOD OF SEVEN-EIGHT DEFECTIONS FROM WITHIN RULING LABOR ALIGNMENT. KEY TO PASSAGE WOULD THEN REST WITH SEVEN "MODERATE" MEMBERS OF NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY, WHO TOGETHER WITH FAR LEFT PARTIES OUTSIDE COALITION, COULD PROVIDE NEEDED MAJORITY. WE UNDERSTAND BEHIND-THE-SCENES CONSULTATIONS ARE CURRENTLY UNDERWAW TO ASSURE THEIR SUPPORT.

12. ON TO GENEVA--- IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED THAT, WHETHER EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI INTERIM AGREEMENT IS ATTAINED OR NOT, GENEVA CONF SOON WILL RECONVENE-- PROBABLY IN APRIL OR MAY. MANY ISRAELIS BELIEVE SECOND-STAGE GOE-GOI AGREEMENT COULD
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HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPACT IN ENHANCING PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER PROGRESS AT GENEVA. IF NEGOTIATIONS FAIL, IT WOULD BE REGARDED NOT ONLY AS SETBACK FOR US, BUT ENCOURAGEMENT TO SOVIETS, SYRIANS AND PLO, THUS UNDERMINING CONFERENCE'S PROSPECTS AB INITIO. IN SUM, SECOND-STAGE GOE-GOI AGREEMENT IS SEEN AS KEY TOFUTURE, WITH DANGER TF WAR LOOMING IN BACK-GROUND IF PROCESS OF ACCOMMODATION IS STALEMATED.
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